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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Monday, April 6, 1942

SUBJECT: "SMALL FRUITS FOR HOME GARDENS." Information from plant scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Let's talk today about growing your own fruit. Let's talk about a fruit garden for every family with enough land to grow it-- a garden to supply fresh fruit for the table all summer and extra to can for the rest of the year. A home fruit garden, like a vegetable garden, is family insurance in vitamins and minerals, especially good insurance in emergency times against such difficulties as rising prices or delays in transportation.

At the National Nutrition Conference last summer fruit was one of the foods that received "honorable mention" over and over again. Doctors, and nutrition scientists, and health workers--all the experts went on record as urging Americans to eat more fruit. At meetings you heard statements like these: "More fruit in the diet would mean better health for many American families"....."Farm and small-town people as well as city people often go short on fruits"....."Families on low incomes often suffer from lack of vitamin C because they do not buy enough fruit and vegetables"....."If more families grew their own fruit, they could afford a better diet and better health."

These few echoes from the National Nutrition Conference give you an idea of the value of fruit, and the advantages of growing your own. Still another reason for growing your own fruit is that everyone likes fruit. The color of fruit and its refreshing flavor make it a pleasure to eat. You may have to urge Junior to eat his spinach and beets, but you don't have to urge him to try a bowl of ripe red strawberries, or raspberries, or a bunch of grapes. Fruit is one of the pleasantest ways of getting minerals and vitamins.

The scientists these days suggest fruit and vegetable gardens rather than orchards for family use. The small fruits--the berries, and grapes, and currants--are often more satisfactory for home growing than tree fruits. The old apple tree--and the pear and peach and cherry tree--any kind of fruit tree needs considerable care and spraying to keep it in health. In fact, unless you have time and skill and spraying equipment to look after trees properly, a home orchard may become more of a burden than a blessing. But a strawberry bed, a grape arbor, and a good berry patch can supply you with fruit all season at the minimum of time and trouble. Small fruits have at least 3 advantages over tree fruits for the home garden. They come into bearing earlier. That's one advantage. They take up less space. That's another. And the control of pests is much easier with them.

You don't need a great deal of extra land to grow fruit. You can build an arbor over your front or back walk and grow grapes there without taking up any extra space. You can train berry vines over the back fence. And you can use currants and gooseberry bushes to make a hedge for your vegetable garden. Just remember one thing about growing any of this fruit. It needs full sun exposure. None of it is adapted to shade.

The best soil for growing fruit is fertile and well-drained. Most fruits do best on an upland site out of danger of the frosts that settle in valleys and hollows. Fruits need sunshine. Don't plant them too near forest trees, or in the shade of houses or buildings.

Now about the fruits to choose for the home garden. First choice is the strawberry. Some variety of strawberry will thrive in any part of the country. Strawberries are the first fruits ripe in the spring. They are the most popular of all the berries. They are as rich in vitamin C as citrus fruit. To keep your strawberry bed producing a good crop regularly, remember to plant a few new plants each spring.

Second choice in fruits for the home garden is the grape. Like strawberries, grapes of some variety will thrive in almost any locality. And you can have grapes of both early and late varieties. If you plant your grapes with this in mind, you'll have fruit ripe on the vine over a long period. Grapes are very wholesome fruits. Grape juice is a popular beverage and very easy to put up at home. Grapes contain so much sugar that usually you don't need to add any sweetening when you can the juice.

As for other berries--raspberries, blackberries, dewberries, youngberries--the kind to choose depends on your location and soil. Blackberries can endure hot weather but they can't stand drying out--dry soil or hot dry winds. (Perhaps you've noticed that wild blackberries often grow down in ravines where the soil is damp and they are protected from wind.) As for raspberries, they do best in a cool climate--can't take hot or dry weather. Unfortunately, raspberries suffer from many different diseases. In most places it is not wise to plant red raspberries and black raspberries together. The reds carry a disease that kills the blacks. Dewberries like a warm climate. They're the berries to plant down South.

Now a note or two about gooseberries and currants. They like a cool climate. They can survive warm summers if they have plenty of dampness in the soil, but need freezing winters. They do best in heavy soil. Probably you know that in certain places the law forbids growing currants or gooseberries. The bushes harbor a disease that kills white pines, so wherever white pines grow, currants and gooseberries are out.

That's all the notes about small fruits for home gardens today. If you want further information, you're welcome to bulletins free from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

